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Sister Remberta Westkaemper: a fine lady and excellent field botanist

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A Fine Lady and Excellent Field Botanist: *Sister Remberta Westkaemper, O.S.B.*



A Centennial Year Project

Stephen G. Saupe

CSB|SJU Biology Department



Acknowledgements



CSB Centennial Year Fellowship – *Spring 2014*

- Botanical biography
- Database all Sister Remberta's specimens in CSB | SJU Bailey Herbarium (>1000 records)
- Display for the Clemens Library

Thanks to:

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Images

- Thanks to the Saint Benedict's Monastery Archives for supplying the images of Sister Remberta. All other images by SG Saupe.

Why Sister Remberta?



Epitome of the Centennial Year (1913 – 2013)

- Nearly a Centenarian (1890 – 1988); incl. 81 years in Monastery
- Sister Remberta arrived 1905; First vows – 1908; Final vows in 1911
- Diamond (75th) Jubilarian (1983)
- BA – CSB (1919), MS (1922) & PhD (1929) – UM
- Taught at the Academy & College since 1917
- Founding member of the CSB Biology Department
- 5th President – First non-Prioress & fulltime (1957 – 1961)
 - Appointed by Mother Richarda Peters
 - 70 yo
- Excellent Botanist
 - Founded CSB Herbarium
 - Expert plants of Stearns County

"'But, Mother, I am past the retiring age.' She answered dryly, 'One does not retire in the convent.'"

"I wished myself back into biology every day and was glad that with the change in prioress, Sister Linnea Welter was appointed college president, and I did go back to biology."



WESTKAEMPER

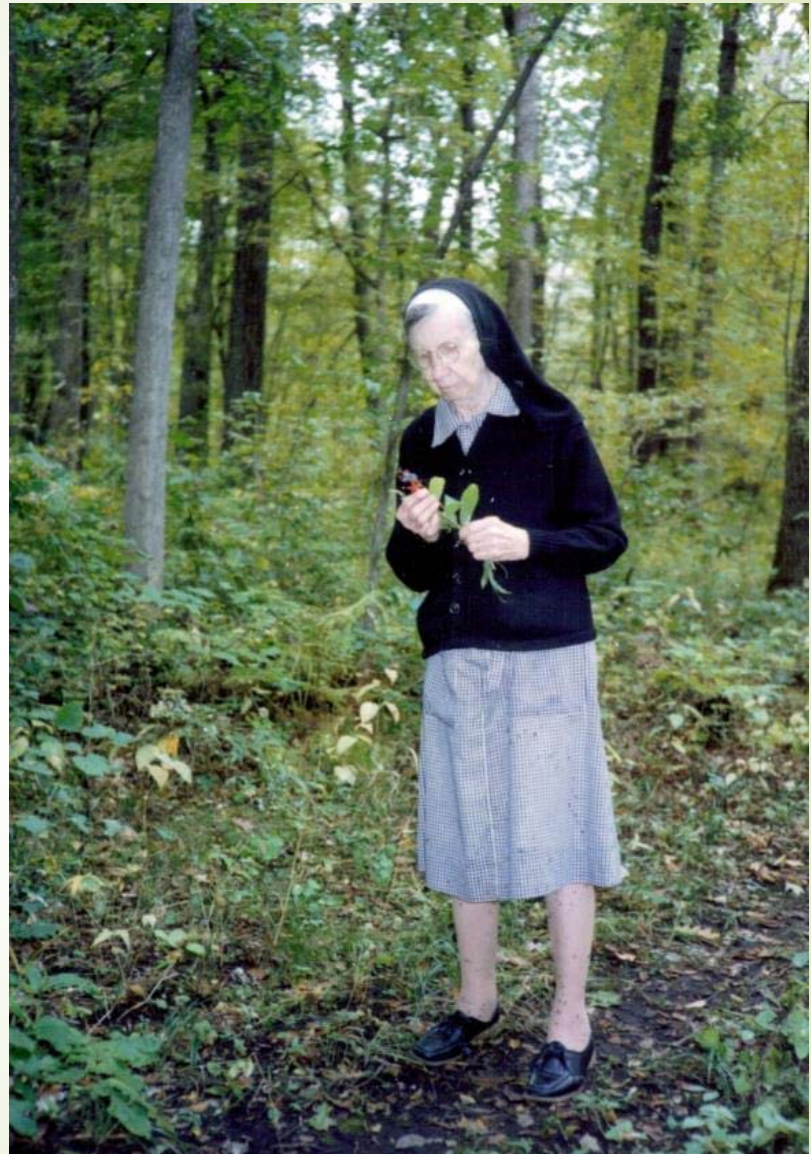
Honors

- West Apartments (Dec. 1971)
- Professor *Emerita* (1973)
- Outstanding Educator in America (1972)
- MN Academy of Science – Charter member
- President's Medal (1969)
- *Who's Who in American Women* (1968)
 - Sister Anatomy O.B.F.
 - *Our Best Friend*



“Outdoor girl”

- “I spent the summer roaming the pastures and being amazed at nature.”



Fieldwork is "is one of the best hobbies there is."




Sense of wonder

- "a sense of wonder...is indispensable."
- "curiosity to go after things."




“There are enough wonders in the world today. But not enough wonderers.”






The Joy of Fieldwork



*"Finding the first
violets and hepaticas
in bloom was always
a thrill . . . We were so
happy to find those.
Each field trip was
filled with joy. . ."*



On finding large-flowered trillium. . .



"How it got there we don't know. That was a great thrill. The girls were so excited. They ran ahead, shouted, and they said, 'Sister, you told us that there are no large-flowered trilliums here in the woods' . . . and we had them spread all through."

The important details



"I knew [the students] would forget the details of botany, but I wanted to make sure that they would learn to stand and stare, to develop the sense of wonder and the sense to wonder."


“Fieldwork afforded not only added biological knowledge but to promote the sense of wonder, and to promote class spirit.”



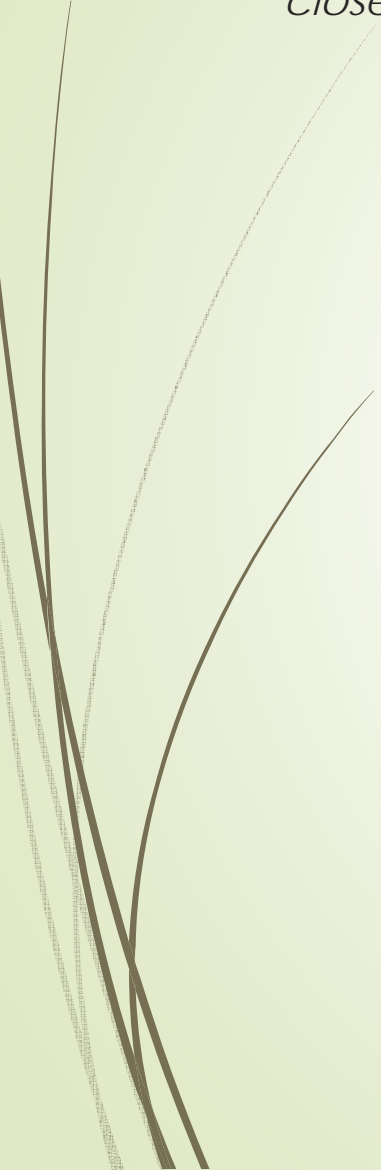

I "could out walk any student . . . They had a hard time keeping up with me. And I covered the whole Stearns County."



- *"ran us all ragged"*
(Sister Phyllis Plantenberg)
- *"In the fields and woods, Remy moved with an energy and spirit found only in the young."*
(Sister Nancy Bauer)
- *"do double-time to keep up with the pace she set for the hike."*
(Rene Kaluza)
- *WHY?*
- *"I haven't got all the time in the world, you know. Not at 82. Besides, you get more tired if you dawdle."*



"I had never seen one before. And then a whole field of them. I can't say what is the most beautiful sight for me, but this would have to be close."





*"No true nature
lover ever
becomes a
delinquent."*

Divinely Inspired



- ▶ *"You find God more in the forests than in the books. Woods and stones will tell you things you cannot hear from teachers."*
- ▶ *"for Sister Remberta, botany was theology; the study of goats-beard and goldenrod, the study of God."
(Sister Nancy Bauer)*

The Plant Scientist



- 1000+ specimens
- Pre-eminent authority on the flora of Stearns County



Checklist for fieldwork



- ▶ "a sturdy pair of legs" because "you can start out in a car, but the end of every field trip is on foot."
- ▶ Sister Remberta wore "the same pair of tennis shoes from the day I came to college until the day she retired."
(Sister Margaret van Kempen)



Marilue Johnson (Dec. 1974)

"I thought you were so pretty in the paper – I had to do a figure in clay. Please forgive my putting on extra pounds or making the tennis shoes blue – but the figure needed some color."

Collecting Containers



- Vasculum
- Plastic bags





"suddenly stop to fetch a flower from the ditch."

"somewhere south of St. Cloud where the road [Hwy 10] parallels the railroad tracks she observed an abundant blooming patch of Pasque Flowers gloriously arrayed along the Railroad Right of Way. She asked me to stop which I quickly did. Sister then proceeded to reap the flowers, seeming almost to embrace them and sweep them from the ground. She was almost in glory and grateful with excitement."

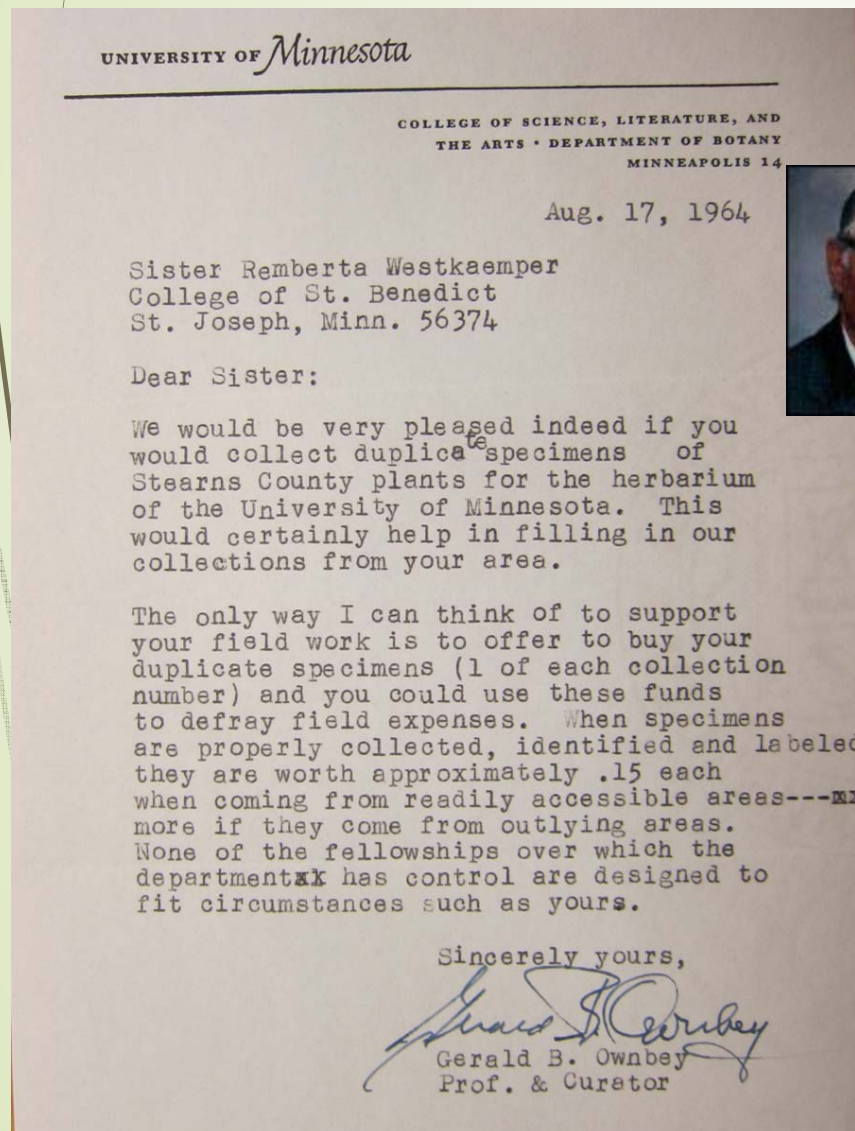
William Cofell

Founder of the original CSB Herbarium



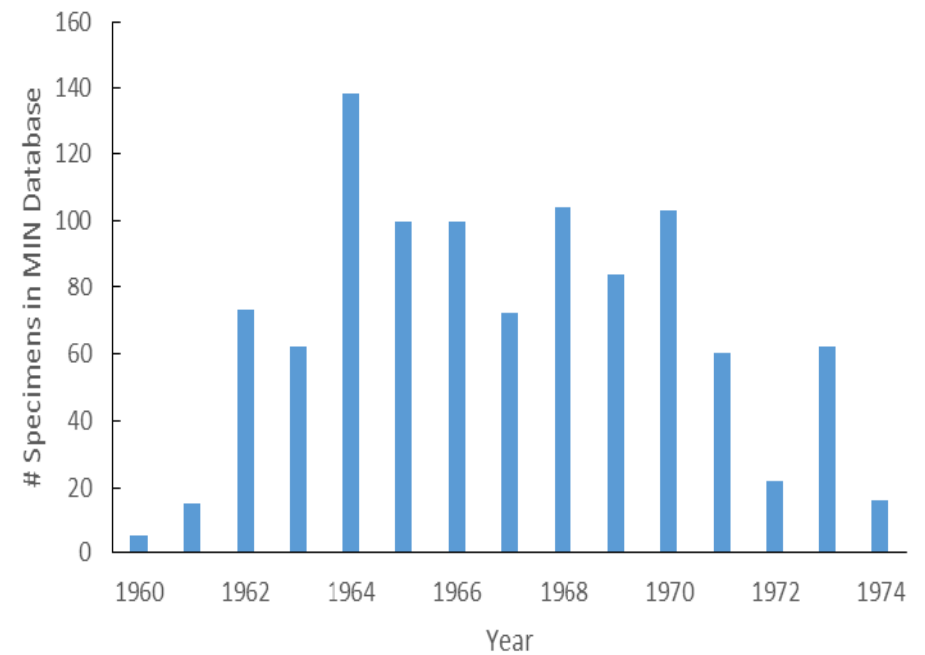
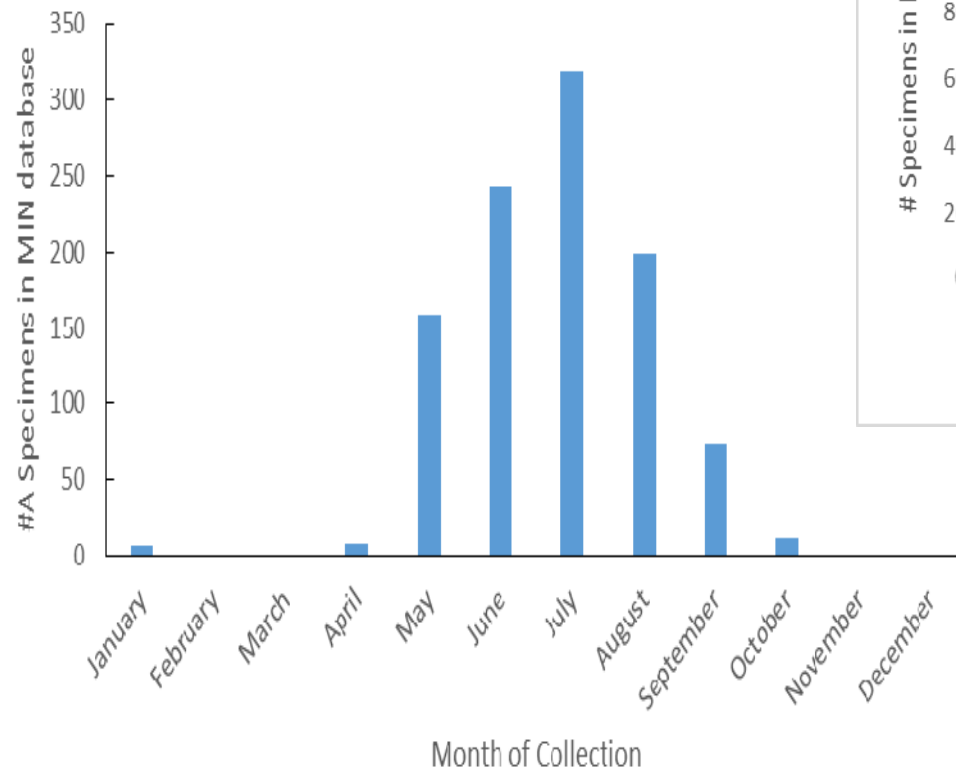
- What is an Herbarium?
 - Plant morgue
 - Reference library of plants
- Brief History
 - CSB & SJU herbaria originally separate
 - Merged in 1970's
 - CSB collections moved to SJU
 - Dr. N. Zaczkowski first curator of joint collection
 - S. Saupe – assumed role in 1994
 - Bailey Herbarium (1999) – Gordon & JoAnne Bailey
- 30,000+ specimens
 - 28 cabinets
 - Largest private college herbarium in Minnesota
 - Third largest in state (after UM-TC, UM-Duluth)

University of Minnesota Collaboration



- *"very pleased indeed if you would collect duplicate specimens of Stearns County plants for the herbarium of the University of Minnesota."*
(Dr. Gerald Ownbey, 1964)
- \$0.15 / specimen
- First batch – 312 specimens (1965)
- *"excellent specimens and we are glad to have such a nice series from Stearns County."*
- Monastic records confirm 931 plants; 7 exchanges; \$150.65

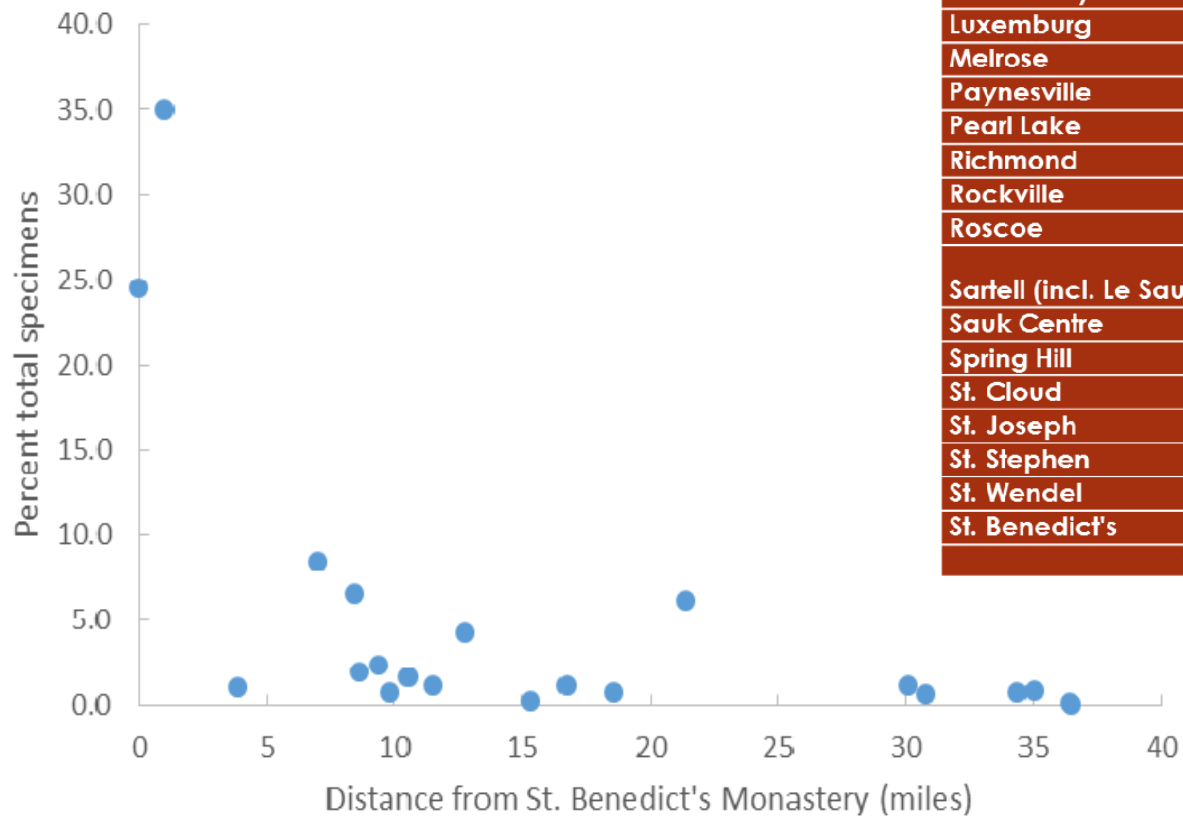
When did she collect?



Where?

Table 9. Locations in Stearns County where Sister Remberta collected plants based on specimens deposited at the University of Minnesota Bell Museum Herbarium (MIN). The distance from St. Joseph is from Google Maps.

Town/City	Distance from St. Joe	# Specimens at MIN	% total
Avon (incl. St. Anna)	11.5	12	1.2
Cold Spring	12.8	44	4.3
Collegeville	7	86	8.4
Greenwald	36.5	1	0.1
Jacob's Prairie	9.8	8	0.8
Lake Henry	34.4	8	0.8
Luxemburg	18.6	8	0.8
Melrose	30.1	12	1.2
Paynesville	30.8	7	0.7
Pearl Lake	16.7	12	1.2
Richmond	15.3	3	0.3
Rockville	9.4	24	2.4
Roscoe	21.4	63	6.2
Sartell (incl. Le Sauk)	8.6	20	2.0
Sauk Centre	35	9	0.9
Spring Hill	36.4	2	0.2
St. Cloud	8.4	67	6.6
St. Joseph	1	357	35.0
St. Stephen	10.5	17	1.7
St. Wendel	3.9	11	1.1
St. Benedict's	0	250	24.5
Total		1021	100

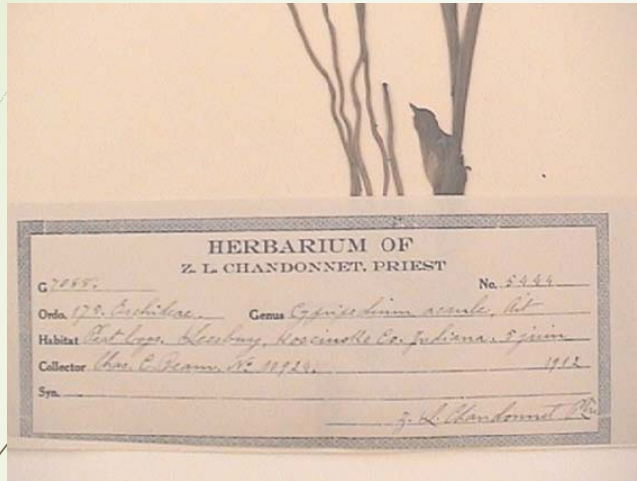


The Best Place?



- The St. Benedict's Woods – "one of the best places for field trips that there is."
- "We have on our own campus a tract of wood very rich in varied plants as the terrain is unusually varied, including a lake and a tamarack woods."
- Though the "woods is not very big . . . it is one of the richest woods that I've ever visited."
- "It has such a variety of soil that you find so many plants there . . ."

The Z.L.Chandonnet Collection



"this [Z.L. Chandonnet] collection was obtained by CSB before 1917 . . . The original owner, Reverend Z.L. Chandonnet, indicated in his will that his Herbarium collection . . . was to be sold to a small college where it would be kept intact. Our college [CSB], he stated, was to have first chance to buy it . . . Father Chandonnet, a native of Minnesota, was forced by tuberculosis to spend a great deal of time out of doors. He started collecting plants and flowers as a hobby. His hobby lead him to become one of the worlds' greatest botanists, highly honored and respected by his colleagues."

Press Bulletin - Sister Juliana, O.S.B.; April 13, 1967

- Zephyrin Leonard Chandonnet
 - born July 10, 1848 (St. Pierre, Canada)
 - died Nov 18, 1915 (Perham, MN)
 - Chaplain St. James Hospital
- The Collection
 - 6000 specimens
 - Worldwide, esp. U.S., France, Canada, Puerto Rico, Switzerland, Algiers
 - Specimens date to 1888
 - Collected and exchanged specimens with botanists worldwide

Original St. John's Herbarium



- Initiated by Urban Fischer O.S.B. in 1885
- James Hansen O.S.B. – *studied mosses, ferns, flowering plants and insects – major collector*
- Gunther Rolfson, O.S.B. (curator in 1960's)

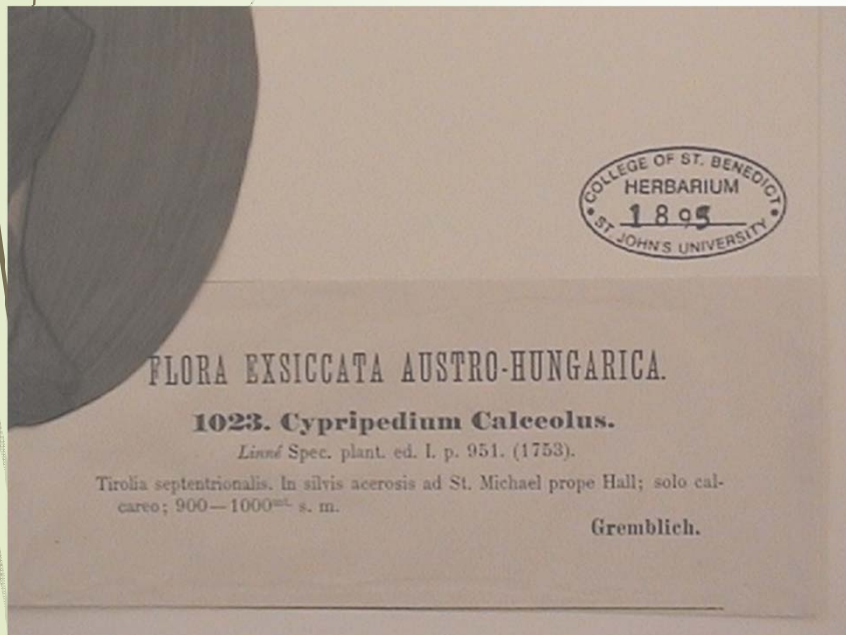


Flora Exsiccata Austro-Hungarica



- Set of specimens prepared for sale or exchange
- Commissioned by the Imperial Academy of Science
- Dr. Anton von Kerner (University of Vienna) first director
- Later replaced by Dr.'s Karl Fritsch & Richard von Wettstein
- Began in 1881, finished *ca.* 1902
- 4000 specimens = full set
- 80 specialists & collectors participated

The Road to the St. John's



- Fr. Pius Stasser & Fr. Bernard Wagner – Abbey Seitenstetten
- Abbey received 1.5 sets of the collection
- Abbot Theodore Springer offered to sell the extra half-set to Abbot Alcuin in Feb. 1926
- Abbot Alcuin asked Fr. James about the collection
"the collection is of the highest authority, and correspondingly valuable..."
- A draft for \$100 sent & \$2.12 (postage) sent March 1926
- On Nov 9, 1926 Fr. James received 10 boxes, 2000 specimens

"...is a valuable scientific monument to the former famous Austro-Hungarian monarchy."

letter from Fr. Pius Stasser to Fr. James

Conclusion

Sister Remberta is a “Fine Lady” & “Excellent Field Botanist”

Dr. Max Partch
St. Cloud State University

“It made me proud to be so far from home and find your specimens and be able to say, ‘I know that fine lady and I know what an excellent field botanist she is.’”

